I: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
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## CHAPTER III

### THE ETHNOLOGICAL SETTING; THE PRIMITIVE RACES OF BASTAR

IT remains in this chapter, before passing on to the main subject of this book, to outline the distribution of races in Bastar and to some extent in adjacent districts; the major political divisions of India seldom correspond to racial divisions, and each of the main races of Bastar overflows into other provinces or States. This discord between political and racial divisions has not made it easier for students to understand the ethnography of this part of India. An area mainly peopled by primitive Mundari or Dravidian speaking tribes of similar customs, rites and manners extends from the Santal country on the borders of Bengal and Bihar, through Chhota Nagpur and the Orissa States into the Central Provinces and the old Central Provinces States, of which Bastar was the chief, into the Jeypore zamindari now included in the new Orissa province, the East Godavari Agency of Madras, and beyond the Godavari into Hyderabad State. Hitherto the area has been divided administratively between the local governments of four provinces and one major State, Bengal, Madras, the Central Provinces, Bihar and Orissa, and Hyderabad; the many Orissa and Central Provinces States were under the control of the governments of Bihar and Orissa, and of the Central Provinces, so that the student has been spared separate census reports and ethnographic surveys for them. Even so, there have been four census reports and three provincial publications on tribes and castes from which to glean the required information; perhaps the formation of the new Eastern States Agency and the separate province of Orissa will mean two more census reports in 1941. To make matters worse, there is confusion of names; the Parja of Bastar becomes Poroja in Madras official language, and the Bhattra becomes Bottada. The Gond, wherever he speaks his own language, from Central India to the Eastern Ghats and Hyderabad, calls himself Koi or Koitor; yet only in Madras and Hyderabad reports is he called by a name approaching this in sound, Koya, and in the literature of the Central Provinces there has therefore been a tendency to restrict this name to Teluguized members of the race. Everywhere it is more usual to call primitive tribes by the local Hindu name for them, and not by their own name for themselves. So over much of India the prevailing Hindu name Gond, and not Koi, is used; and with his usual passion for standardization the

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official in India has tried gradually to call all the Koitor race Gonds, whatever the name by which they call themselves or the local vernacular name for them, and even to include under the generic term Gond other races or tribes who are not Koitor but only resemble them more or less in their customs. All the Koitor of Bastar have thus been officially classed as Gonds, though the name Gond is still hardly known in Bastar and is regarded by most Koitor of every local variety as an insult, except by Hinduized Gond immigrants from Chhattisgarh. If official and ethnographer would always use the names by which tribesmen call themselves when speaking their own language, we should possibly find many of the so-called branches of the primitive races not branches at all but merely classified as such in the past owing to unintelligent failure to realize that in different tracts different Hindus have used different names for the same race or tribe.

The difficulty is accentuated by the tendency, familiar throughout India, of local groups of primitive races which are gradually being Hinduized to regard themselves and to be accepted by their Hindu neighbours as separate Hindu castes under new names. So arise such names as Raj-Gond, Raj-Korku, Raja-Muria, Naik Gond, Pit-Bhattra; and it will be seen below how this process has worked in Bastar.

Almost a reverse process is also at work, by which the remnants of forgotten tribes or old confederations of tribes not necessarily akin or speaking the same language have long been known under the common name applied to the whole confederation. The links that used to hold them together disappear, and those sections of the confederation that are socially or culturally more advanced object to being dragged down to the same level in popular esteem as the backward sections, and so prefer to abandon the name given to the confederation in favour of the original or some new name of their own section. The Parjas are a clear example of this, as beyond the Jeypore border they include at least seven different tribes, some speaking Munda, some Dravidian and some Aryan dialects, which differ widely in customs and degree of advancement: the Bastar Parjas except, it is said, the few wilder ones beyond the Kolab-Sabari in Sukma zamindari and around Mount Tulsidongri in Sukma and Jagdalpur tahsil, now invariably call themselves Dhurwa and resent being called Parja. The name Parja appears to be only a corruption of the Aryan term '*praja*' applied to subjects as distinct from the '*raja*' or ruler.

It is difficult to give figures for the growth or decline of the tribes of Bastar, as the 1931 census was the first since 1891 in which almost all the primitive races of Bastar were not lumped together

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by separate vernacular designations. The Jagdalpur group is detribalized by palace contacts and the proximity of Halbi and Uriya speaking elements both in Bastar and in Jeypore.[1] The Jhoria group are probably Hill Marias settled in the plains. The Gotul Murias have definite traditions of immigration from Raipur and the north. 'Muria' is a term coined by non-Koitor for those Koitor who are somewhat less un-Hinduized than the primitive Marias, and is used by any section of Marias as soon as it wishes to claim social advancement. The Bastar official applies it not only to the three sections of Murias classified above, but also to the Koyas and some of the Doria Koyas of the south, and to the more advanced Bison-horn Marias of Dantewara and Bijapur. The census figures of Murias therefore contain various Koitor from Kutru and Bhopalpatnam zamindaris and from Konta and Bijapur tahsils who should have been enumerated as Koyas or Marias.

On the latter account perhaps about 15,000 should be deducted from the census total of 124,993 Bastar Murias, leaving a round figure of 110,000. About 32,000 of these are Jagdalpur Murias, 17,000 Jhorias and 61,000 Gotul Murias. These are very approximate figures, roughly calculated from the total populations of the different charges into which each tahsil or zamindari was divided for census purposes.

**The Marias—General**

It has more than once been indicated in the preceding pages that I divide the so-called Marias into two divisions, the Hill Marias of the Abujhmar mountains, and the Bison-horn Marias. The former call their land Metabhum or 'Highlands', and call themselves (and are called by their neighbours on the plains and plateaux of Antagarh, Kondagaon, Jagdalpur, Dantewara and Bijapur) Meta Koitor, the Highland Koitor. To avoid confusion in the mind of any later investigator, it should be observed that this name is also given to themselves by the Bison-horn Marias living on the high edges of the Jagdalpur and the Dantewara tahsils in contrast to their brethren below in Dantewara or Sukma and Sukma or Konta respectively. If, however, a native name is needed for the Marias of the Abujhmar mountains, Meta Koitor could well be adopted; the general level of their villages is far higher than that of any other villages in Bastar. Hill Marias, however, is the term which I shall use, the word Maria being now familiar in ethnographic literature. By the Hill Maria the men of the plains, be they Muria, Jhoria or Bison-horn Maria, are called Dor Koitor, Hatiya Koitor or Kalpatti

[1] Mr. C. Hayavadana Rao in an article on the Gonds of the Eastern Ghauts, India, published in *Anthropos*, 1907, says that the Gonds of parts of Jeypore are known as Murias.

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101 Koitor, all meaning Lowland Koitor, and the plains below are either Dorbhum, Hatiyabhum or Kalpatti; Dor Koitor and Dorbhum, the terms most commonly used, are probably the source of the expression Dhur Koitor said to be used fairly generally in the Central Provinces to designate the ordinary Gond as distinct from the one who gives himself social airs as a Raj-Gond; a Gondi word has been assimilated to the Hindi '*dhur*' or '*dhul*' meaning 'dust', and the Gond commoner referred to as the 'Dust' Gond. Hatiya-bhum is simply the land of the *hat* or bazaar. *Kalpatti* is the ordinary Halbi term for lowlands, which we have already seen applied as the name of two *parganas* in Antagarh. Hatiya is similarly the name of a *pargana* in the north of Kondagaon.

161 The Hill Maria tracts are shown by the letter E in the ethnographic map. An account of their country and distribution has been given already in Chapter II, pages 26-8. The estimate of 11,500 population is fairly accurate; I examined the actual census returns of all the Hill Maria villages except the five included in the outlying Mangnar *pargana* of Bhopalpatnam zamindari, and obtained a total of 11,361 (5,702 males and 5,659 females). There can only be 140 or 150 persons at the most in the Mangnar villages. Since the census, many Hill Marias have come back to the Abujhmar, chiefly from the Ahiri zamindari; it was found when the poll-tax settlement was effected in 1932 that 240 able-bodied males had so returned; probably, therefore, the Hill Maria population is now just over 12,000 in Bastar. There had in the past been a considerable exodus of Marias from the old Paralkot zamindari, owing to the zamindar's oppression. As they consider the new conditions in Bastar better than those in Ahiri, more may be expected to drift back into Bastar.

Hill Marias

The tract is extremely homogeneous. In 22 Hill Maria villages in Kutru with 1,443 Hill Marias the only non-Marias are 38 Rawats and 1 Halba; in 9 Hill Maria villages in Dantewara there are 879 Marias to 3 Telanga, 98 Rawats and 19 Mahras. The Rawats are only in the villages near the plains where they are employed by Marias to tend cattle and are beginning to teach them the use of the plough and the milking of cattle; they speak Maria as fluently as Halbi, and in outward appearance are scarcely distinguishable from Marias. Most of the Hill Maria villages are in Antagarh, and have hardly any outsiders except occasional Rawats or liquor contractors. The few blacksmiths are really Marias, knowing no 564 other language than Maria, having the same clans as the Marias and still occasionally marrying Maria girls; though, as among other tribes, there is always a tendency to look down on the blacksmith,

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and to make him live by himself on the outskirts of the village, so that in the end he becomes almost a separate low caste. This, however, has not gone nearly as far among the Hill Marias as among the Bison-horn.

To the south, along the Indrawati valley, the Hill Marias are influenced strongly by the Bison-horn Marias, and the area concerned is marked on the map by the letter H. The influence of the Bison-horn Marias gets less as you go west down the valley towards Kutru, and beyond Kutru is replaced by that of the Telugu-influenced Koitor of the riverain tract, known generally in those parts as Dorlas. There is no doubt that the inhabitants of most of these villages near the river were once Hill Marias. They seem to have been enumerated as Murias in the 1931 census, and are included in the 15,000 persons whom I have indicated at the end of my account of the Murias as wrongly enumerated at census as Murias. Where the Hill Marias are the immediate neighbours of the Bison-horn Marias, the influence of the latter is strong. In theory, according to local legend the Mander, a tributary running more or less east to west and joining the Indrawati on its *southern* bank near Barsur, is the boundary between the two kinds of Marias, with the Indrawati as the boundary west of the confluence. Here the Hill Marias know the Bison-horn Marias as Dandami Koitor; but the name is not universal in Bastar, and I have therefore preferred to call them Bison-horn because the wearing of bison-horns by their male dancers is so obvious a peculiarity of the tribe. Formerly, the legend says, Pat Raja, the log-god of Mornar in the Mangnar *pargana* who is regarded almost as the overlord of all the log-gods of the Hill Marias, and his wife's brother Use Modia, the log-god of the Lekami clan at Ghotpal, a large Bison-horn village south of the Indrawati, between Barsur and Gidam, divided up the Hill and Bison-horn Marias into *dadabhai* and *akomama* clans (brother-clans and wife-clans), and in those days the Hill Marias used to intermarry with the Bison-horn, and each used to attend the other's festivals. One day, as the Gumelor clan of Hill Marias, which occupies a group of villages in Bhairamgarh Mar, Dantewara Mar and Mangnar, was trooping to Ghotpal to dance at the Koqsar festival there, carrying their axes on their shoulders, a Gume with his axe accidentally severed the *sem* bean vine of the Old Widow (*Kuram Mutta'i*), who thereupon put a curse on all the Hill Marias and forbade them ever again to come south of the Mander river for social or religious purposes. Since then, according to the Hill Marias, intermarriage and participation in each other's festivals has ceased. On the other

**Hill Marias of Indrawati valley, influenced by Bison-horn Marias or Dorla Koitor**

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582 hand some Hill Marias say that there is no theoretic obstacle to intermarriage, but that actually 'it isn't done', though they occasionally take part in each other's festivals. The Bison-horn 177 style of dancing with long *dol* drums is gradually spreading among 535 the lower villages just north of the Indrawati. Hudala Karka, for example, some eight miles from Barsur and on the northern bank of the river, now dances entirely in Bison-horn style, and claims to be a Bison-horn village, the claim being admitted by the Bison-horn Maria *pargana* headman in theory, and in practice by intermarriage with undoubted Bison-horn villages; but in several houses I found old Hill Maria dancing shields (*moghi*) and buttock-bells, and the older men admitted that when they were young they 177 danced in the Hill Maria style. Another sign of this is that Hurra [176] Gunda, the log-god of the Tamo clan at Tumirgunda, near Hudala Karka, is also the log-god of the Atami clan of Hudala Karka and of two other Atami villages south of the Indrawati. The clan-priest of the god is a Tamo, and the Tamo villages of Tumirgunda and Padmeta still dance in Hill Maria style. In a few years, therefore, the Bison-horn Marias will have adopted the valley villages north of the Indrawati; the *pargana* headman already virtually claims them as such, since they are under his direct jurisdiction and not that of the Hill Maria *chalki* or assistant appointed to help him [197] manage the eight Hill Maria villages of his *pargana*. In speech, too, they are approximating more and more to the Bison-horn Marias, as there is a marked absence of the harsh guttural sounds so characteristic of the Hill Maria language, and they use the Bison-horn technical social and religious terms.

● 101 Westward along the valley, as observed above, Bison-horn Maria influence gets less. For a few miles, roughly from Nelasnar 177 to Jegur on the Matawara-Kutru road, and in the village of Ketulnar beyond Jegur, the people are now known as Murias but are really Hill Maria stock, and still dance in Hill Maria style. Ketulnar still intermarries with the hill villages of the Kutru Mar *pargana*. The villagers of Bheriabhum, on the south bank opposite their former village of Pali, five or six miles north of Bhairamgarh, are of the Hill Farsal clan, and cannot be distinguished from Farsalor of the hills. In the hill villages above the valley I verified occasional marriages with girls from the valley villages and vice versa.

101 The tract west and south-west of Kutru, marked by the letter L on the ethnographic map, contains a very scanty population, which appears to be Hill Maria in origin, much modified by contact with the Telugu-influenced Dorla Koitor from the south, who are shown by the letter K. These mixed elements also were returned

[See cat. 116, p. 418. - Analyst]

1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
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as Muria at the census, while the actual Dorla Koitor appear to have been shown under Gond.

The census total of Marias was 146,070. I estimated at the end of my account of the Murias that 15,000 Marias and Koyas had been wrongly enumerated as Murias. This raises the total of Marias to 161,070, counting all the 15,000 whether Koyas or not as Marias, for reasons which will appear below. My adjusted census figure for the Hill Marias was 11,500. The mixed Hill-Bison-horn villages except Tumirgunda were excluded from this, and for demographic purposes may be regarded as Bison-horn. The valley villages occupied by Hill Maria stock and the villages of mixed Hill Maria and Dorla stock at the most have 3,500 inhabitants, though spread over a large area. Excluding them and the 11,500 pure Hill Marias from the 161,070, we get a balance of 146,070 as the strength of the Bison-horn Marias. To this I would add the 9,988 returned at census as Koyas, giving a total of 156,058 Bison-horn Marias. Of these, about 50,000 are in Jagdalpur, 60,000 in Dantewara, 7,000 in Konta, 3,000 in Kutru, 1,000 in Bhopalpatnam, 26,000 in Sukma, and 9,000 in Bijapur.

**Bison-horn Marias, Koyas and Dorlas**

The southern borders of this race are fairly clear when enquiry is made on the spot, but very difficult to ascertain from previous literature owing to the lack of precision of nomenclature. Much trouble has arisen from the word Koya. Glasfurd did not define Koyas or give their habitat in the report already quoted. In a report on the ethnography of the old Upper Godavari District including Bastar, printed in a collection of papers for a Central Provinces ethnographic exhibition in the sixties, he wrote :—

> 'Along the southern boundary we find the Telingas tolerably pure, but with a large mixture of intermediate castes, such as the Koys and Naikwars, which last the late Mr. Hislop classed among the Gonds. Proceeding inward we find the Telingas cease, and the Koys and Gottawars become the sole inhabitants. The former belong also to the Gond family; but from their vicinity to the Telingas they have acquired many of their words, and as the latter are the superior race, the Koys ape their manners a good deal. The Gottawars are inferior to the Koys in caste; but not so in appearance nor in physical conformation. Where they live close to Telingas, they also have acquired many of the Telugoo words; but they do not, as the Koys, ape Telinga manners.
>
> 'Proceeding still farther towards the interior, we find the Gottawars the prevailing class, and in the centre they appear merely to change their name; for the Maria is in no wise different from the Gottawar.'

In the classified list of races annexed to his report he gives as habitat for Koys the 'banks of the Godavery, Pranheeta and Savery rivers, and the Beejee, Potukul, Kotapilly, Veejapore, Soonkoom and Bhopalputnum Talooks of Bustar'; for Gottawars

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●101 'Seroncha Talook and Bhopalputnum, Veejapore, Chintulnar, Dunteewara, Kootroo and Barsoor Talooks of Bustar'; and for Marias 'Kootroo, Chintulnar, Dunteewara and Veejapore Talooks of Bustar, and also that part of Bustar called Ulrugmad[1]'. He notes that the Gotta language is nearly allied to the Maria. He uses [103] Telugu versions of Bastar place names, just as the Survey of India did in the old topographical survey maps; by Savery, Beejee, Potukul, Kotapilly, Veejapore and Soonkoom he meant Kolab-Sabari, Bhiji, Phutkel, Pamer-Kotapalli, Bijapur and Sukma. Bhiji is the old name of the south-eastern part of Konta tahsil; Phutkel is a former zamindari in the Talper riverain tract of Bijapur tahsil, while Chintulnar is now in Konta tahsil, occupying the tract at the foot of the Aranpur pass. Except, therefore, for his inclusion of Sukma in the region of the Koyas, his distribution of the 'Koys, Gottawars and Marias' corresponds very closely with the areas shown in the ethnographic map for Dorlas, mixed Maria-Dorla, and Marias; in his Report on the Dependency of Bastar he had stated that Marias constituted 90 per cent. of the population of Sukma.

114 Various articles were published between 1876 and 1881 on the Koyas, whom he rightly calls Kois, by the Rev. John Cain, for many years a C.M.S. missionary at Dummagudem on the Godavari in the Bhadrachalam taluq of the East Godavari Agency, and only a few miles from the south-western corner of the Konta tahsil. These articles were the basis of the article on the Koyas in Thurston's *Tribes and Castes of Southern India*[2]. He wrote in the first of these :—

> 'I propose to notice first the Kois, a tribe already partially described in Captain Glasfurd's reports and Colonel Haig's report of his visit to Jagdalpur, and also in the Census Report for 1871 of the Madras Presidency. These people are to be found in the country extending from the banks of the Indravati, Bastar, down to the neighbourhood of Kammammet in the Nizam's country. All those in the plains have a tradition that about 200 years ago they were driven down from the plateau in the Bastar country by famine and disputes, and this relationship is also acknowledged by the Gutta Kois, i.e. the hill Kois who live in the highlands of Bastar. Up to the present (1876) time I have had but little intercourse with the Gutta Kois, and the manners and customs described in this paper will be those of the Kois dwelling in the Bhadrachallam taluka.'

Elsewhere he writes that the Gutta Koi of the Bastar plateau 'look down with some degree of contempt on the lowland Koi', who are

[1] An obvious misprint for 'Ubujmard', Glasfurd's spelling of Abujhmar.
[2] Cain's articles are :—'The Bhadrachallam Taluka, Godavari District, S. India', *Indian Antiquary*, Vol. V, 1876, p. 357 et seq.; 'The Bhadrachallam and Kekapalli Taluqas', *ibidem*, Vol. VIII, 1879, p. 33 et seq., and p. 219 et seq.; Vol. X, 1881, p. 221 et seq.; 'The Koi, a Southern Tribe of the Gond', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, Bengal*, Vol. XIII, 1881, p. 410 et seq. There were others in certain missionary journals, which I could not trace.

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called Gommu Koi, or Koi of the river bank, *gommu* being a Telugu word for horn or tusk, used in the Upper Godavari district to mean the banks of the Godavari. He says that the Gutta Koi also generally refer to the lowlanders as '*mayalotilu* or rogues' and say that long ago their ancestors lived with them on the Bastar plateau, but went once to visit a zamindar in the plains, and so liked his country that they settled there and persuaded many others to follow them, and thereafter often harried the plateau in secret marauding expeditions. He refers to the lowlanders as calling themselves Doralu, from the Telugu honorific *Dora* or 'lord', and being called by the Telugus Koi Doralu. The specimens he gives of their language show it to be a Gond dialect very greatly corrupted by Telugu influences, not only the vocabulary but even verb and noun inflexions being Teluguized.

In the *Godavari District Gazetteer* the article on Koyas clearly deals with the lowlanders only, and speaks of the self-importance with which they know that their title *Dora* means 'lord' and insist on being given it, tolerating the alternative '*Mama*' (maternal uncle) from other castes, but disliking being called Koyas.

The designation Gottor is now common among the Telugus and Telugu Koyas of south Bastar for the Marias of the plateaux and the 'Koyas' at the foot of the plateau in Konta tahsil and Sukma zamindari. No one need worry about it as indicating any special race; it is simply a Telugu term for Hill Koitor. Glasfurd, though he wrongly spoke of the Gottor as a separate division, yet righted matters by pointing out that there was no real difference between them and the Marias of Dantewara. Naturally, Bison-horn Marias living on both sides of the southern edges of the plateau would be more influenced by the Telugus than those in the centre and north of the plateaux.

But there remains a real distinction between the Bison-horn Marias, even those who live along the southern fringes of their country, below the passes, and the Koyas of the plains. The latter are known as Dorla, but this is obviously a corruption of Dor Koitor, their lands being to the Bison-horn Marias of the Dantewara and Jagdalpur plateaux, Dorbhum or lowlands. Your Telugu or Englishman writing in Telugu surroundings may say that the social status of the lowland Koya is greater than that of the Hill Koya; but your hill man will always look down with a healthy contempt on the plains man. Cain indeed realized this, but perhaps hardly understood the foulness of the abusive Chhattisgarhi term *mailotia* which he gives with a capital initial letter as the Hill Koya's name for the lowland Koya. The latter knew he was despised by the highlander, and with the self-assertiveness that is the typical fruit

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101 of the inferiority complex palmed off his name Dor Koi or Lowland Koi on the ignorant Telugu as Dora Koi, and has proceeded to 186 object to the name Koi and demand always the name Dora or Dorla, simultaneously impressing on the Telugu how superior he is to the Highlander.

I have verified these points by personal investigation supple- 361 mented by reliable information from assistants directed to make enquiries on specified lines. When the traveller descends the Aranpur pass, he finds the villagers at the foot of the pass in such villages as Gumadasaka, Bikrampalli, Kondasaoli, Kamargudem, Kodmair, Karrigudem, Bayampalli, Kundair, Ursangal, Durandarbha, Michiguda, Vadri, Silger, Mandimarka, Singaram, Tarlaguda Banjepalli and Durma inhabited by people indistinguishable from the Bison-horn Marias above the pass, or by Maria Lohars. The only difference is a noticeable Telugu influence on their Maria dialect. At Jaggergonda, six or seven miles beyond the foot of the pass, he meets the first Telugu-speaking non-Koitor village, and just beyond this comes to the first Dorla villages, Rajpenta, Achkat and Kamaram. Southwards in the country covered by the new Ordnance Survey one-inch maps, on sheet 65 F/3, Singaram in square B1, Puvarti, Junaguda and Rayagudem in A2, Chimili, Surpanguda, Kistaram and Morpalli in B2, all the villages in A3, and Tadmetla, the only village in B3, are Dorla villages. Generally speaking, all the riverain tracts of Bhopalpatnam zamindari, Bijapur tahsil, Kotapalli-Pamer zamindari and southern Konta tahsil are Dorla villages, though here and there will be found Gottor Koya, i.e. Bison-horn Maria villages in Konta Dorla country such as Tokanpalli, Burkapalli and Chintaguppa (in map 65 F/3, square C3).

These Dorla at census refused to call themselves Koya, and 162 were not returned as such but as Gonds; and they are the principal element in the 19,426 professing tribal religion out of the 24,407 Bastaris returned as Gonds in the 1931 census. The 4,981 Hindu Gonds returned are mostly Dorlas from the Lingagiri *pargana* of Bhopalpatnam and the adjacent parts of Bijapur, who have become Lingayats, wearing a *rudraksha* bead in a silver box or a Shiva *lingam* slung on a thread.

It will be clear, therefore, that the 9,988 persons returned at the census as Koyas are not the Dorla or lowland Koyas returned as Koyas in the East Godavari Agency. They are the Bison-horn Marias living at the foot of the passes in Konta and Sukma and slightly influenced by Telugu contacts. Of the Koya dialect of Gondi returned in 1931 as spoken by 6,172 persons in Bastar, however, it is probable that it represents the speech of the Dorla

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invasion by land-hungry Hindus of the highlands and backwoods, with its accompaniment of money-lenders, cloth pedlars, lawyers' touts, landlords and forest contractors.

The terms of reference for my aboriginal enquiry directed my special attention to the conditions in the tribal tracts which had been declared Partially Excluded Areas under the Government of India Act of 1935. Those are the tracts, speaking generally, where the tribes still constitute a majority of the population and by thus being able to preserve much of their own traditional way of life can still present something of a united front to the invasion of new settlers and new ideas.[1] The Partially Excluded Areas of Chanda district include the huge Ahiri zamindari of Sironcha tahsil and the Garchiroli tahsil zamindaris of Dhanora, Dudhmala, Jharapapara, Khutgaon, Kotgal, Muramgaon, Palasgarh, Rangi, Sirsundi, Sonsari, Chandala, Gilgaon, Pai-Muranda, Potegaon and Gewardha. My enquiries therefore gave me a long desired chance of seeing the Marias of Chanda. These zamindaris have a total area of 4,013 square miles, mostly of hill and forest, and had in 1941 a population of 115,031; this figure included 70,821 'aboriginals', so that out of every 1,000 persons, 607 were tribal. In the 1931 census 34,776 of the Gonds of these zamindaris were returned as Marias, against a total of 34,986[2] Marias for all the British districts of the Central Provinces, leaving only some 210 Marias for the *khalsa* areas of Chanda district and the zamindaris of the Partially Excluded Areas of Drug district. The total strength of the Maria tribe in the British districts of the province is given in the 1941 census summary as 39,553,[3] district figures not being shown. Almost all of these will have been returned from the Chanda Partially Excluded Areas.

It has been indicated in this book how vague are the terms 'Maria' and 'Muria',[4] and how all the tribes thus vaguely designated speak of themselves as Koitor or Koi, distinguishing between one group and another by such terms as Highland Koitor, or Lowland or Plains Koitor. Let it be remembered that the word Maria is not a Gondi word and that *all* Gondi-speaking Gonds throughout the Central Provinces and Berar and Hyderabad State speak of themselves as Koitor; then it will be realized how unprecise, unscientific a term 'Maria' really is. Here in these Chanda zamindaris it is

[1] Any investigator of tribal conditions soon realizes that the tribesmen inside the Partially Excluded Areas are not yet in as bad a plight as their kinsmen outside those areas, in the more 'advanced' districts, where they are steadily losing such land as is left to them and sinking to the status of landless labourers in the service of those who have expropriated them.

[2] and [3] *Census of India*, 1941, Vol. I, Part I, Table XIV, p. 112.

[4] See pp. 35-6, 42, 44, 46-50.

1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
AW32 Gond AW32
Hill Maria
Bison Horn Maria



101 often difficult to say where the Koitor begin or cease to be Maria. Much depends on the idiosyncrasies of the census enumerators. Moreover just as in Bastar there is really no hard and fast ethnological boundary line between Hill Maria and the tribes generally referred to as 'Muria', so in Chanda to the north and west of the zamindaris many now classed as Gond would undoubtedly at one time have been regarded as Maria, while where Chanda district borders on the west of the Narainpur (Antagarh) tahsil of Bastar the villagers are ethnically identical on both sides of the border, but on the Chanda side are called Maria and on the Bastar side Muria: of this I had a remarkable instance on my journey north from Surjagarh[1] in Ahiri zamindari to Jarawandi,[2] where the forest track crosses the two small west-protruding tongues of Bastar shown near the north-west corner of Bastar in the ethnographic map on page 40, near the Antagarh villages of Udcha[3] and Irpanar[4] in the southern tongue and Markanar[5] in the northern tongue; men of one clan living in the tongues called themselves Muria while their fellow-clansmen in the adjacent Ahiri villages called themselves Maria.

101 Drug district, Chanda district and Bastar State all meet at the north-west corner of Bastar, as the map on page 40 makes clear. At 161 this corner of Drug are the Drug Partially Excluded Areas, the zamindaris of Aundhi, Koracha, Panabaras and Ambagarh-Chauki transferred to Drug from Chanda in 1907. These zamindaris had in 1941 a population of 82,202, of whom aboriginals numbered 51,452, or 626 in every thousand. Of the latter some 16,750 were returned as practising the tribal religion, and the bulk of these must have been Gond. No 'Maria's' were returned. Yet again, especially in Aundhi and Koracha, there is no racial difference between those returned there as 'Gond', their Chanda neighbours returned as 'Maria' and their Bastar neighbours returned as 'Muria'. Reference to land revenue and settlement records even in Panabaras zamindari[6] shows that down to the great famines at the end of the nineteenth century and even later the local headmen and ryots were frequently recorded as Maria by tribe.

101 All that in fact can safely be predicated of the country covered 131 by my tour in the Chanda and Drug zamindaris is that according to

[1] *Ordnance Survey of India*, Qr. Inch Sheet 5A. ref. MV4774.
[2] Ibidem, ref. MQ5121.
[3] Ibidem, ref. MV4898.
[4] Ibidem, ref. MV5298.
[5] Ibidem, ref. MQ5314.
[6] See for examples Grigson, *The Aboriginal Problem in the Central Provinces and Berar* (Nagpur, 1944), pp. 79-81.

1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
AW32 Gond AW32
Hill Maria
Bison Horn Maria



Central Provinces terminology it was Maria country, or had till recently been thus considered; according to modern Bastar terminology it would be considered Muria country. To this there is one exception. The map on page 20 shows a projection westward into Chanda district of the Abujhmar Mountains between the western border of the State and the Kotri River, north of the Indrawati, just west of the junction of the Behra Mar, Jatwada and Farsal *parganas* of Narainpur (Antagarh tahsil) shown in the sketch-map on page 33. On this projection of the hills there are, speaking from memory, seven or eight villages which are definitely Hill Maria like the adjacent Abujhmar villages of Bastar, completely Hill Maria in culture, peopled by tribesmen who, like the Hill Maria of Bastar, call themselves Meta (Highland) Koitor, and despise the Maria of Lahiri and the other plains villages of Ahiri zamindari below their fastnesses.

I was able to make a rapid tour through much of this Chanda and Drug country in December 1940, and January 1941; certain preliminary investigations before my visit were made for me in Chanda by Mr. J. D. Kerawala of the Central Provinces and Berar Civil Service, who was then the Sub-divisional Officer, and he was with me throughout my tour. Some of the administrative and economic notes made on this tour were incorporated in various chapters of my book *The Aboriginal Problem in the Central Provinces and Berar*[1] to which I shall refer hereafter as *The Aboriginal Problem*, for the sake of brevity. I also filled a thick note-book with ethnographic and anthropological material, and had intended to use that material for this Note. Unfortunately the note-book perished when my house at Hyderabad was burnt down in a sudden senseless riot on the Ides of March 1946, along with almost all my Chanda photographs, the note-books, manuscripts and photographs of twenty-five years in India, and the whole of my library. No doubt this has simplified packing to quit India, but so far as this Note is concerned it has meant depriving it of what would have made it most valuable. It has therefore to be written from memory, and references in *The Aboriginal Problem*.

Let me now describe the tour generally, mentioning the places visited and the persons and things seen. My first halt was at Allapilli[2] in Sironcha tahsil, the site of the teak saw-mills of the provincial Forest Department, a few miles from Ahiri,[3] the headquarters of the Ahiri zamindari, which I visited from Allapilli.

[1] Nagpur, Government Printing, Central Provinces and Berar, 1944.
[2] *Ordnance Survey of India*, Sheet 65A, ref. MV0852.
[3] Ibidem, ref. MV0149.

1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
AW32 Gond AW32
Hill Maria
Bison Horn Maria



Gond element had been scheduled, and many others omitted. It was unsound also to confine the privilege to Marias and Gonds, for there are many other aboriginal or semi-aboriginal tribes, such as Pardhan, Halba, Nagarchi, Thoti and Ojha, and artisan, grazier and untouchable castes living in close symbiosis with the Marias, who should get this concession; such an extension would reduce cases of illegal tapping, possession, sale and transfer, and minimize excise subordinate officials' opportunities for harassment and extortion. One of the worst agents of exploitation in aboriginal areas has been the Kalar excise contractor. The Maria here, thanks to this toddy and sago-palm concession, and the availability therefore in his village of this free source of mild intoxicant and the yeast vitamin, has long been far freer of economic thraldom to the Kalar than the other aboriginals in the province who have not had this concession. Moreover the Maria does not seriously abuse this privilege, except perhaps by occasionally selling or giving toddy to non-Marias. I strongly opposed a Nagpur proposal that 'a beginning should be made in the direction of regulating the drinking of toddy by the Marias of Sironcha' who, it was said, 'literally subsist on toddy for some months of the year and are drunk most of the time'. There may be some truth in this theory of drunkenness in regard to the teluguized plains, villages of Sironcha outside the zamindari, as noted of similar South Bastar villages on page 168. But of the Ahiri Marias it is quite false. For one thing the morning and evening climb of the palm-trees by rough bamboo ladders calls for nerve, and would be impossible for a drunkard. All through this tour I never saw a Maria drunk on toddy. Nor in the average Maria village are there enough tappable trees available to cause a tenth of this alleged general intoxication.

Just near Bhamragarh in one village bitter weeping came from a woman whose husband had been hauled off that morning for illicit tapping of toddy in an excise raid. As usual the main lament was not so much against this being treated—to my mind needlessly—as an offence, as against the social consequences of being handcuffed and imprisoned. Here we were close to the Kasansogh Togh or Kasansur Turri and other islands of the Indrawati formerly the subject of a boundary dispute between Chanda and Bastar, which I had settled in my voyage down the Indrawati from Kutru in 1927; across the river lay Pharasnar, headquarters of a sub-zamindari of Kutru zamindari, where I had then camped. The ethnographic map on page 40 marks the population of the Bastar bank here as mixed Dorla and Hill Maria, or Hill Maria who have almost become Dorla; and on page 52 I have noted that though on both sides of the river the villagers seem to be of Hill Maria origin and still exchange

1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
AW32 Gond AW32
Hill Maria
Bison Horn Maria



brides, yet in the census of Bastar they were recorded as Murias.

Bhamragarh village itself had few Maria residents. Celebrated though it is as a beauty spot, to my mind the junction of the three rivers there can only be appreciated in its full beauty from the Bastar shore or, better still, from midstream, as I saw it first in 1927. This time we stayed in a forest rest-house on the Indrawati bank, and the Zamindar who had motored out to join me talked under the moon till late at night on tribal problems.

Yaws has long been a scourge of the Marias, in Chanda as in Bastar, but whereas the campaigns against yaws, begun when I was in Bastar and carried on with unremitting energy ever since by Dr. W. P. S. Mitchell, the Chief Medical Officer of the State, have now almost eradicated the disease in Bastar save for fresh infection from contacts with Chanda Marias or Hyderabad Gonds and Koyas, in Chanda it is still very rife. Bhamragarh gave us an example typical of the difficulties which may beset schemes for helping the aboriginal in the absence of constant supervision of local minor officials. In 1936 the Government had opened a dispensary at Bhamragarh, primarily with the idea that it would become a centre for yaws treatment. Mr. Kerawala visiting Bhamragarh just before my tour, finding that hardly any yaws or other patients attended the dispensary, inquired why, and was told that the Assistant Medical Officer posted there was demanding a fowl and eggs from every Maria as a fee for each injection. His plea was that he had extreme difficulty in getting supplies, so that unless he could 'live on' the Marias he often had to go back by cart the 38 miles of forest track to Allapilli to get supplies, which meant closing the dispensary for nearly a week at a time. One of many things into which I was looking during this tour was the progress in Chanda of the first year of an anti-yaws campaign financed from a Government of India grant. Before that campaign began such anti-yaws work as had been attempted had been haphazard and unplanned, and nothing had been done to ensure that each patient took the full number of injections needed for a permanent cure. At all my camps in the Marias country patients streamed in for treatment, and as the Sub-assistant Health Officer deputed to accompany me for yaws work travelled in my lorry and had to stop in every village on our way to treat yaws patients, our arrival in camp was generally long after dark. The incidence of yaws seemed far greater than the Public Health Department had imagined. We had cases, as I have said, at every camp, perhaps especially among the Hill Marias at Kuvakodi, in Lahiri, and in all the villages between Pirmeli and Surjagarh, and thence on into Aundhi zamindari in Drug district;

2: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1947 AW32 Gond AW32
Muria



are excellent, and there are few places to which a bullock-cart and even a car cannot be taken with a little care.

Although the Muria area is divided officially into the two tahsils I have described, the people themselves think much more in terms of the smaller administrative unit, the pargana, the Manjhi or Chief of which is the court of appeal in all tribal disputes. The parganas of Narayanpur are clearly defined blocks of territory with considerable homogeneity of custom and fashion within their borders. But in Kondagaon, the parganas are very broken up. The Keskal, Kongur, Chalka and Mardapal Parganas are well defined, but the Hatiya and Sonawal Parganas, to name no others, are scattered all over the tahsil, and it must be hard for the Pargana Manjhi to exercise any sort of control over the area in his charge.

It has always been a tradition of the State to allow the village panchayats, which we may call judicial committees of village elders, to have jurisdiction over most tribal offences with a final appeal to the Maharaja. Since 1932 the jurisdiction of the village courts has been greatly extended to include cases of simple hurt and assault, minor thefts, mischief, trespass, adultery and enticement. They can also settle civil claims up to a value of twenty-five rupees. The Pargana Manjhi are not personally members of these courts, but to them lies any appeal from their findings. These men, who have the privilege of wearing red turbans, are a useful link between the aboriginals and the Administration. Though some of them abuse their position and tend to divert fines to their own use, they are on the whole a first-rate body of men, and their friendship is invaluable to the investigator.

The tradition of local self-government, so firmly established in the State, is an important factor in the conditions that make the ghotul and its organization and discipline possible.

## II. The Tribal Population of Bastar

The tribal population of Bastar is varied and interesting. In order to simplify my description I will adopt the names given to the tribes by Grigson, though it must be remembered that, convenient though these often are, they are not always the names used by the people themselves.

*The Hill Maria* are the least influenced by the outside world and have retained most of their religious and cultural institutions. They live in the Abujhmar Mountains and there were 11,500 of them in 1931, and probably some 13,000 now. They are both shy and friendly, an attractive people, cultivating their desolate and lonely hills with axe and fire; their life and customs have been fully described by Grigson.

*The Bison-horn Maria*, a great tribe of some 175,000 persons, live south of the Indrawati in the Dantewara, Konta, Jagdalpur and Bijapur Tahsils and in the Sukma Zamindari. Grigson has studied them in less detail than the Hill Maria.[1] They have very little contact with the Muria of the north, except that they meet parties of them coming down from the Chota Dongar and Mardapal Parganas to dance at the great Marhai at Ghotpal. Their characteristic dance is the marriage dance with a splendid bison-horn headdress. A megalithic culture survives among them, and there are traces of a ghotul system long since moribund.

[1] A detailed study of one aspect of their life will be found in my *Maria Murder and Suicide* (Bombay, 1943); some of their folk-tales are given in my *Folk-Tales of Mahakosal* (Bombay, 1944).

## INTRODUCTION

*The Bhattra.* In 1931 the Bhattra numbered 36,611 in Bastar, but there are many more of them in Jeypore and Kalahandi. In Bastar they are strongest in the north-east of the Jagdalpur Tahsil, but a 'Bhattra movement' is spreading

THE DISTRIBUTION OF ABORIGINAL TRIBES IN BASTAR STATE

among the Muria of Kondagaon. Its main features are the wearing of a sacred thread and the abolition of the ghotul. They are said to have come with the first Raja of Bastar from Warangal, and they are rapidly becoming a Hindu caste like the Raj Gond, to whom they are probably related.

## THE MURIA AND THEIR GHOTUL

101 *The Dhurwa*, or Parja, live in the south-east of the Jagdalpur Tahsil and in the Sukma Zamindari. In Bastar there are about 20,000 of them, but there are many more of the allied Poroja across the border in Orissa. Their dancing is distinctive, but many of its elements can be paralleled among the Muria.

*The Gadaba*. There are very few of these left in Bastar. In 1931 only 398 were returned. The Bastar Gadaba have retained little that is characteristic of their tribe. They have no connexion with the Muria of the north.

*The Halba*. This is a powerful and important near-Hindu caste, probably descended from the old military garrisons stationed in the larger villages. There were 18,427 of them in 1941, of whom 4599 were in the Narayanpur and 3149 in the Kondagaon Tahsil. Their language, Halbi, is used throughout the State; many of the Gondi-speaking Muria use it as a second language, though Chhattisgarhi is now competing with it. The best folk-poetry there is in Bastar is composed in Halbi. The Halba sometimes serve as priests of the Anga clan-gods in the Muria country and the caste has its own Anga similar to those of the Muria.

*The Dhakar* is a new caste—9596 strong—recruited from the offspring of mixed Halba and Kshattri unions. Many of its members, by their intelligence and ability, have won good positions in the State.

*The Jagdalpur Muria*, or Raja Muria, are in my opinion the least attractive people in Bastar. Like the Raj Gond, they consider themselves superior to the Maria or Muria of the north; like the Raj Gond they have lost most of their own culture without assimilating that of the Hindus. It is possible that the Raja Muria are civilized Bison-horn Maria rather than civilized Muria, but it is impossible to be sure. They have been greatly exposed to external influence, from the Palace, from Orissa, from the cult of Danteshwari; many of their villages are leased to outsiders. Grigson estimated that there were about 32,000 Raja Muria in 1931; there may be some 40,000 now.

Of these tribes the most important in their influence on the Muria are the Hill Maria. The Bhattra and Raja Muria exercise a disintegrating effect upon them in the south. The Halba live in scattered little communities throughout the Muria area and influence those who live in their immediate neighbourhood.

Other castes living among the Muria are the Rawat, the Mahara, the Kalar, the Lohar, the Ghasia, the Ganda, the Nahar and the Pardhan.

*The Rawat* are the cowherds living in almost every village. They are also known as Ahir or Kopa. Their children are usually admitted to membership of the ghotul. The Rawat's association with the cow ensures him a good social position. As Eha says, 'His family having been connected for many generations with the sacred animal, the cow, he enjoys a certain consciousness of moral respectability, like a man whose uncles are deans or canons'.

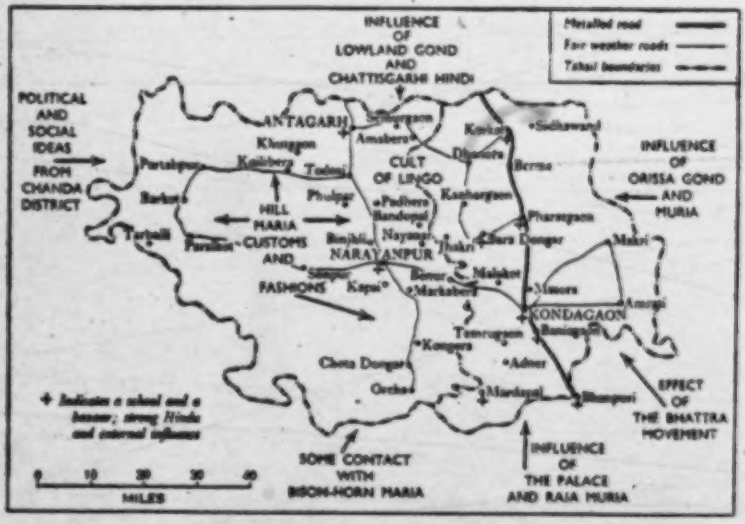
*The Mahara*, who numbered 32,787 in 1941, the *Ganda* (7130) and the *Panka* (4178), on the other hand, have officially a very low status. No one is 'untouchable' in a Muria village, but children of these castes are not usually welcomed in the ghotul and a liaison or marriage with a Mahara or Ganda is regarded as unforgivable. Once at Lamkhanar I met a Muria, Duaru, who went out of his mind because his wife eloped with a Ganda. On the other hand, these people have an important place in tribal life. They are the spinners and weavers of the countryside and supply the Muria with much of their cloth. They generally provide the village watchman or Kotwar and they thus have the duty of reposting Muria births and deaths. Mahara musicians attend the more sophisticated Muria weddings. More important still, they are famous for their powers of divination as Siraha. Scores of Mahara mediums appear at the greater Muria festivals and at the Dassera

2: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1947 A W32 Gond A W32
Muria

## INTRODUCTION

celebrations in Jagdalpur. Many—but not all—of these people are aboriginal in everything but name; in feature, colour, dress and manners they are hardly to be distinguished from their Muria neighbours.

*The Lohar* living in Muria villages are generally tribal Lohar, not members of the great Hindu caste that bears this name. Muria and Maria who take to iron-work are separated from the rest of the tribe and have now been formed into an endogamous community of their own. The Muria generally regard the Muria-Lohar as somewhat inferior, but their antagonism does not go so far as to ban Lohar boys and girls from the ghotul. In 1941 there were 7877 Lohar in the whole State and 2718 in the two Muria tahsils.




SKETCH-MAP TO ILLUSTRATE THE INFLUENCES AFFECTING THE LIFE AND CUSTOMS OF THE MURIA

Many *Kalar* are obviously aboriginals who have taken to the liquor business. Well-to-do Muria occasionally take contracts for distilling and selling mahua spirit. There are 13,451 Kalar in the whole State.

*The Ghasia*, of whom there are only 1704, are regarded with considerable scorn by the aboriginals who suspect them of desecrating their graves to obtain the 'grave-furniture' buried with the corpses. Yet they owe much to this caste, which is responsible for making, by the *cire-perdue* process, the brass images and horns used in Muria worship, buttock-bells for dancing and ladles for serving liquor.

*The Pardhan.* There are only a few members of this most interesting tribe, allied to but distinct from the Gond, in Bastar. But there is a Pardhan

2: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1947 AW32 Gond AW32
Muria



Pujari for the shrine of Lingo Pen at Semurgaon and Pardhan minstrels and priests are to be found in some Muria villages. Pardhan boys and girls are admitted to membership of the ghotul.

I found *Nahar* at Kuntpadar and at Kabonga and neighbouring villages. Their boys and girls had joined the ghotul and were taking a leading part in its affairs. Elsewhere this tribe has a very low position: it is mainly to be found in the west Central Provinces and Berar and is regarded as derived from a mixture of Bhil and Korku.

## III. The Muria

*Kariya mur ke manse ãn. We are the dark people.*—Muria saying

The word 'Muria' is used in Bastar to mean, generally, an aboriginal. In this sense it has long been applied by State officials to all the primitive tribes except the Maria of the Abujhmar. In recent years the people themselves have also widely adopted it. Throughout the Dantewara Tahsil and in the Sukma Zamindari, the tribe which Grigson calls 'Bison-horn Maria' returned themselves as 'Muria' at the 1941 Census. There are also the Muria of the Jagdalpur Tahsil. There is thus a good deal of confusion about the proper classification of the Bastar aboriginals. Let me therefore say at once that when I use the term 'Muria' in this book, I apply it to the aboriginals of the Kondagaon and Narayanpur Tahsils whose culture centres round the ghotul. Grigson estimated that there were some 78,000 of these in 1931; there are about 100,000 now.

The name Muria has been derived from *mur*, the palas tree, or from *mur*, a root.[1] There is no apparent reason why the Muria should be named after the palas tree, which is neither a totem, nor specially honoured by them, nor even common in their territory. But the derivation of the word from *mur*, a root, has much to commend it. *Mur* may also mean 'permanent', as in *mur podor*, a permanent or regular name as opposed to a nickname: the Muria, in contrast to the Hill Maria, have permanent settlements and dwellings.

Early writers were impressed by the industry and cleanliness of the Muria. They are good cultivators, said Sir Benjamin Robertson in 1891, 'active, hardy and well-behaved and their villages are generally clean and comfortable'.[2] Hislop describes them as more civilized than the Maria, forming 'the bulk of the agricultural population in the north and centre'. Beyond the eastern frontier, however, 'where they mix with the Khonds in Patna, Kharond and Jeypur, they are somewhat wilder and devoted to the chase'.[3]

We must now survey these Muria of the north, for they are not all of one family, and the differences between them are interesting and significant. I will begin with the western parganas, lying to the west and north of the great mass of the Abujhmar Hills. It is in these hills that the key to many a Muria custom will be found. The people of these parganas seem to be Hill Maria who first settled in the plains and then came under strong alien

[1] R. V. Russell and R. B. Hiralal, *The Tribes and Castes of the Central Provinces of India* (London, 1916), Vol. III, p. 64.
[2] *Census of India, 1891*, Vol. XI, Part I, p. 186.
[3] S. Hislop, *Papers relating to the Aboriginal Tribes of the Central Provinces* (Nagpur, 1866), Part I, p. 21.

2: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1947 A W32 Gond A W32
Muria



influence from across the Chanda border. Their villages are a compromise between the communalism of the Maria and the individualism of the Gond; the houses are arranged in streets and open on to one another, but they have substantial independent gardens behind. The women often dress in almost Maria fashion, exposing the breasts, but wearing few ornaments, and the men imitate the fashions of the Chanda border. Ten years ago, at the time of a Satyagraha agitation, many of them bought Gandhi caps. These are still worn, but pulled out of all shape to make them politically respectable. The ghotul is used mainly by boys and men; in Maria fashion it is the centre of the male life of the village, a tendency which the external influences across the border tend to strengthen.

In the northern parganas, the Muria have many links with their fellows in Kanker State and the Drug District. There are ghotul in both these areas, but in Drug ghotul life has become furtive and obscene, strumpeted by the contagion of the plains. The people in these northern parganas look and dress like the Gond of the Central Provinces; they have no affinities with the Maria of the neighbouring Padalibhum, whom they regard with amused astonishment. But they have the ghotul system very fully developed, although some of them vehemently deny the fact at a first conversation.

To the east, the Antagarh and Amabera Parganas are very similar—the people in dress and manners akin to the Gond of the Central Provinces. Here the cult of Lingo is at its strongest, and the Muria appear to be immigrants from the north. Although the ghotul flourishes, the people here are perhaps the least attractive of the Muria, for they are suspicious, timid and ill-mannered.

There is a striking contrast between these drab and sullen northern Muria and the people south of Narayanpur. This is the country of the best, most beautiful, most charming of all the peoples of Bastar, the so-called Jhoria Muria. These Muria are, according to their own account, Maria of the Abujhmar who have settled in the plains. They have retained a great deal of their original Maria culture but, where they have altered, they have improved and developed it—an astonishing variant of the normal result of culture-change.

In Bastar, says Hislop, 'the Madias are also called Jhorias, probably from *jhodi*, a brook'.[1] Dalton, deriving the word Maria from the Gondi term for a tree, *mara*, says the Maria 'are also called Jhoria, from *jhodi*, a brook. This is the name given to the gold-washers in Chutia Nagpur, who are in all probability Gonds likewise'. The word Jharia is found as the name of the wilder sub-divisions of several tribes in the Central Provinces,[2] and there is a section of the Poroja of Orissa called Jhoria.[3] I visited some Jhoria villages in Koraput District in 1944. They are an attractive people, with a fully developed megalithic culture and the village dormitory, but they bear no resemblance to the Bastar Jhoria.

The first to describe these 'Jhoorias' was Glasfurd who, writing in 1862, says that they 'are found principally in the north-western parts about Narayenpoor and Partabpore, and extend towards Kakeir; they are a numerous

[1] Hislop, *op. cit.*, Part I, p. 7.

[2] P. N. Bose gives Kottur or Jharia among his classes of Gond, 'to which class', he says, 'the hill Gonds belong almost exclusively. Jharia literally means "jungly".'—P. N. Bose, 'Chattisgur: Notes on its tribes, sects and castes' in *JASB.*, Vol. LIX (1890), Part I, p. 283.

[3] *Census of India, 1931*, Vol. I, Part III B, p. 197. A note by M. W. M. Yeatts on the Porojas and Saoras. See also G. Ramadas, 'Porojas', *Man in India*, Vol. XI, p. 247, and E. Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India* (Madras, 1909), Vol. VI, pp. 209ff.

3: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1943
AW32 Gond AW32
Bison Horn Maria
Muria



existence among the Muria of the Ghotul or village dormitory, in which the boys and girls of the tribe grow up from childhood under a high degree of discipline and are trained in the tribal virtues. A system of what is practically pre-nuptial sexual communism teaches them from an early age the impropriety of jealousy. The habit of sharing everything all through childhood and youth in the dormitory weakens their individualistic attachment to personal property. The result is that several of the main causes of murder only lightly press upon them. The Bison-horn Maria probably had a similar dormitory club at one period and traces of it may still be found today. But it no longer exists as a social force, and the result is that the Maria—compared to their northern neighbours—grow up passionate and jealous, strongly attached to individual goods, undisciplined and revengeful. The Muria do not seem to consume any less alcohol than the Maria. Indeed the consumption of mahua spirit per head in the Muria area is higher than in the south. The Maria, however, drink more rice-beer, and there are many more cases of illicit distillation detected among them.

When my friend Mr A. N. Mitchell was Administrator of Bastar, he was troubled by this problem, and one day in conversation about it, one of us—I forget which—suggested that I might make some sort of survey of Maria homicides from my own independent angle. Mr Mitchell, with his unique zeal for everything affecting the life and welfare of aboriginals, gave me all possible facilities for my enquiry, and I was thus able not only to study official documents but also to visit the jail and discuss matters with many criminals.

The first task in my enquiry was to get at the records. I decided to confine myself to the exclusive study of the Bison-horn Maria, and here we were immediately faced by our first difficulty which was to decide who were to be included under this name. The name has come to be used in Bastar and in anthropology as a result of Mr W. V. Grigson's memorable book, *The Maria Gonds of Bastar*. But it is not, of course, a word that is used by the people of themselves. Many of them now do not call themselves Maria at all. At the 1941 Census, thousands of Maria returned themselves as Maria, because they thought it sounded more respectable. Many others in the south have for some time

3: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1943
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Bison Horn Maria



past taken the title of Dorla. Others again are known as Koya, and a few call themselves Gond. When I was in Konta, the very wild Maria there said, 'We are not Maria. That is the name of the uncivilized fellows in Dantewara'. When I was in Dantewara, the equally wild Maria there indignantly rejected the old name which, they said, was only properly given to the savages of Konta. The expression 'Bison-horn Maria' is an obvious linguistic makeshift. Another name for the tribe is Dandami Maria. But I have never heard this used by the people themselves, and many do not know what it means. The name 'Bison-horn Maria' is derived from the tribe's custom of using a magnificent head-dress of bison-horns for their marriage dances, and possibly 'Tallaguda Maria' or even 'Sing Maria' (an expression in actual use) would preserve both the descriptiveness of the title and linguistic propriety. But for the time being I have continued to use the very convenient term, Bison-horn Maria, and throughout this book it will be understood that, wherever the word 'Maria' is used without qualification, it is to the Bison-horn and not the Hill variety of the tribe that I refer.

It will be evident, however, that official records, which are not concerned with scientific classification, were not likely to preserve these nice distinctions between one tribe and another, and I was at first provided with a very large number of files, many of which had nothing to do with the Bison-horn Maria at all. I think it is not unlikely that the bad reputation of this tribe for violence is, to some extent, due to the fact that a number of people who do not belong to it are included when statistics are compiled. However, at last, after much sifting and sorting, I found that I had a collection of 103 records of Bison-horn Maria homicides covering the years 1921 to 1941. During this period there must have been nearly 250 such cases altogether, but some of the files had been eliminated and others for one reason or another were not available. However, 103 was a very fair sample. For convenience I omitted the last 3 cases, and was thus left with a set of 100 taken entirely at random, distributed throughout the period under review and taken from every part of the area.

It was rather more difficult to get records of suicide, for

# INTRODUCTION

101 NO aboriginal people of India has attained greater prominence on the political scene of past centuries than the large group of tribes commonly known by the generic term Gond. When the mist that still veils long periods in the history of the Deccan finally lifts, Gonds appear not only as the main population of wide areas in the very heart of India, described after them as Gondwana, but also as a ruling race equal in power and material status to many contemporary Hindu princes. Lacking unity and leadership the Gond states collapsed before the successive onslaughts of Moghul and Maratha armies, but the Gond populations remained, the old feudal system continued to function in [21] many remote tracts and several Gond rajas enjoy up to this day the status of ruling chiefs. But besides the advanced sections of the Gonds who vied with Hindus in the fields of war and statesmanship, there were and still are the great masses of primitive peasants and forest dwellers on a cultural level no higher than that of other aboriginal populations in the Central Indian zone. Of their economics, social organization and religion, historical sources tell us next to nothing, and the study of Gond culture, as a distinct element in the culture pattern of India, falls to the anthropologist, who finds an almost overwhelming wealth of material among the many vigorous branches of the Gond family.

184 101 [19] Spread over an area considerably larger than the British Isles and extending from the Godavari gorges in the south to the Vindhya Mountains in the north, the Gonds are neither racially, nor culturally, nor linguistically a homogeneous population. So great are the differences in custom and material circumstances between many of the widely scattered tribal groups that one may well wonder what causes them to be considered, and indeed to consider themselves, as members of the same race. Wherever we find Gonds, unless they are totally detribalized and merged with Hindu populations, they describe themselves as Gond or, if speaking Gondi, as Koitur, the universal equivalent of that name in all Gondi dialects. Were it not for those large groups of eastern Gonds, who speak Chhattisgarhi Hindi, the Gonds in the north-west of the Central Provinces, who speak western Hindi and the far smaller groups of Telugu speaking Gonds, better known as Koyas, in Hyderabad and Madras Presidency, it would probably be most satisfactory to replace, at least in ethnological usage, the general name "Gond" by the term "Gondi speaking populations," thus leaving it open whether there exists such an entity as a Gond people or only a group of peoples who to-day speak related languages. Indeed, I believe that we shall fail in

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our approach to the Gond problem—one of the cardinal problems of Deccan ethnology—unless we envisage the possibility that the tribes now known as Gonds, far from being the dispersed off-shoots of a once homogeneous people, attained a certain and very limited measure of cultural uniformity only when they came under the sway of the same dominant linguistic influence.

Gondi with its many local dialects is a Dravidian language of the so-called intermediate group, and stands, according to Grierson, closer to Tamil and Kanarese than to Telugu. But it seems highly improbable that the Dravidian tongues, which were no doubt associated with the representatives of the pre-Aryan high-civilizations of Southern India, should have been the original languages of tribal populations as primitive in racial and cultural make-up as the Hill Marias of Bastar and certain Koyas of Hyderabad. Just as such widely separated aboriginal tribes as the Chenchus of the Nallamallai Hills, the Hill Reddis of the Eastern Ghats and some, though not all, Naikpods and Kolams in the hills of Adilabad have adopted Telugu to the exclusion of any other tongue, without anyone considering Telugu as their original language[1] or claiming the present linguistic uniformity as proof of a genetic connection between all those tribes, so the peoples now speaking Gondi may, in times past, have abandoned older tribal tongues in favour of a Dravidian language spoken by neighbouring populations or the members of a ruling class. J. H. Hutton believes that by a similar process the Oraons of Chota Nagpur have adopted their present Dravidian tongue[2] in place of a Munda language, and I fully agree with his assumption that a large-scale Dravidianization of aboriginal tribes occurred partly previous and partly parallel to the Aryanization of which we are still witnesses.[3]

The idea that Dravidian Gondi represents a comparatively recent element in the linguistic pattern of the Central Indian belt has already been voiced by R. V. Russell, who put forward the theory of a Gond incursion into the Central Provinces from the south between the ninth and the thirteenth century A.D. This probably goes too far and is not supported by ethnological evidence; in solving the language problem it is not even necessary to assume a wholesale migration of all the Gond tribes from Dravidian lands south of the Godavari to the Central Provinces and the hill-tracts of Bastar. It is sufficient to postulate the invasion of a people limited in numbers but superior to the older tribal folks in organization and material equipment, and the subsequent spread of its Dravidian language and perhaps certain elements of its culture among the tribes previously speaking one or several older tongues. Indian history provides numerous examples of such an imposition of a foreign

1. In the case of Naikpods and Kolams an older tribal language is still spoken by other groups.
2. Oraon belongs to the same intermediate group as Gondi.
3. *Census of India*, 1931, Vol. I, Part I, p. 358.

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language on aboriginal populations, and it seems more probable that such tribes as the Muria Gonds, with their close cultural and racial affinities to the Austroasiatic Gadabas of Orissa, were subject to a change of language than that they immigrated from distant parts of Southern India.

We are not yet in a position to surmise which population may have been responsible for the spread of Gondi or which pre-Dravidian languages Gondi may have replaced. Both questions will perhaps remain for ever unanswered, but linguistic research among the Gondi speaking peoples, the still entirely mysterious Khonds, and the neighbouring Austroasiatic tribes may still lead to surprising results. Since the days of Grierson's Linguistic Survey few trained linguists have done fieldwork among the tribal populations of Peninsular India, and the most admirable descriptive works of amateurs cannot compensate for the absence of comparative studies by experts.[1]

The replacement of an older language by one of more recent introduction, is an accomplished fact among many of the eastern and northern Gonds, who speak now the Chhattisgarhi dialect of Hindi and various other local dialects. But there can be no doubt that these Aryan languages were adopted from neighbouring Hindu populations instead of tribal tongues, and certain place-names are to-day the only evidence that the languages previously spoken were related to the Gondi spoken by other sections of the Gond family.

According to the Census of India the total number of Gonds in 1931[2] was 3,063,753. With their strong tribal consciousness they are the premier aboriginal race of India, exceeding by more than one million the number of Bhils and dwarfing such tribes as Oraons, Mundas, Hos and Santals.

The majority of Gonds—2,261,138 in 1931—are found in the Central Provinces and Berar, which contain practically all the territories known to the early Moghul writers as Gondwana. Except for Buldana in the extreme south-west, there is no district in the Central Provinces

1. The limited value of linguistic material contained in the writings of anthropologists is to none more obvious than to the authors; such texts, for instance, as given in this volume may facilitate the linguist's approach to an unwritten language, but they are insufficient as a basis for linguistic conclusions. For very relevant phonetic peculiarities may entirely escape the attention of the untrained observer, or defeat his attempts at recording them. In linguistics as in anthropology there is no substitute for field work. The dearth of authoritative works on the tribal languages of India was lamented by J. H. Hutton in his Census report: "There is, however, a serious void in our knowledge in that no intensive work appears to have been done on the tribal dialects of southern India, so that it is impossible to say whether the Munda languages ever penetrated to the extreme south of India or not. The linguistic survey unfortunately did not include southern India in its scope, and there is therefore a crying need for an intensive study of the dialects spoken by such tribes as the Kadar, Kurumans, Paliyans, Panians and Thanda Pulayans, with the object of discovering whether or no any Munda survivals are to be found." (Op. cit., p. 158). Hutton's call to linguists has, to my knowledge, remained largely unheeded. M. B. Emeneau who worked among the Todas being a laudable exception. But equally urgent as the study of the tribal dialects of South India is intensive work on the tribal language of the Central belt.

2. No later figures for individual tribes are available, the Census operations of 1941 having been curtailed for reasons of economy.

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101 without a considerable Gond population, but the main strongholds of
162 the Gonds are to-day the Satpura plateau including the districts of Betul,
197 Chhindwara and Seoni, where the western type of Gondi is spoken, Mandla and Chhattisgarh in the east, where the Gonds have adopted the local dialect of eastern Hindi but retained their tribal identity, and in the south Chanda and the neighbouring Yeotmal, where the language is Gondi, but of a dialect somewhat different from the Gondi of Betul.

101 To the north-west the Gonds extend across the Narbada River into
691 Central India, and are particularly numerous in Indore State; to the
197 east of the Central Provinces lie the states of Gond princes, such as
[619] Kawardha, Sakti, Raigarh and Sarangarh, to-day known as the Chhattisgarh States. Although neither these Gond rajas, nor indeed the Gonds among their subjects speak Gondi, they are fully conscious of their tribal associations and the high status of the ruling princes adds no doubt to tribal prestige in the whole of Chhattisgarh.

Further south, bordering on Chanda, Drug and Raipur, extend the two States of Kanker and Bastar, where Gonds constitute the majority of the population. Bastar in particular is the home of three important groups of Gonds: the Murias, the Hill Marias and the Bisonhorn Marias, all of which differ in language and custom very considerably from the Gonds of the Central Provinces.[1] Their colourful and complex cul-
[174] tures are representative of ancient aboriginal India and show obvious affinities with the Austroasiatic cultures of Orissa and Chota Nagpur. Bastar has also part in the Koyas or Dorlas of the Godavari area, the most southern branch of the Gond family occurring in considerable strength in Madras Presidency and Hyderabad State and stretching across the barrier of the Eastern Ghats into the vicinity of Rajahmundry. Most Koyas still speak a dialect of Gondi, but those surrounded by Telugu populations, have changed over to Telugu.

Another substantial group of Gonds, closely akin to the Gonds of Yeotmal and Chanda, is found in the hilly country between the Godavari and the Penganga Rivers constituting the Adilabad District of H.E.H. the Nizam's Dominions, and it is these Gonds who form the subject of the present work.

101 All the Gonds of Adilabad, except for an insignificant overflow of
186 Dhurwe Gonds from Chanda, consider themselves Raj Gonds, and this brings us to the still somewhat problematic division between Raj Gonds and Dhur or Dhurwe Gonds, which runs through the greater part of the Gond population within the Central Provinces. There seems to be no uniformity in the principles ruling this division; in Chhattisgarh only the members of ruling or formerly ruling families are described as Raj Gond, while in other parts most of the land-holding Gonds aspire to this denomination. In recent times the name Raj Gond has also been
[668] claimed by certain Gonds who have tried to raise their social status by

1. The Hill Marias extend into the hills of the neighbouring Chanda District.

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compliance with Hindu customs, and "Raj-Gond" reform movements have made their appearance in the Central Provinces.

Various theories have been advanced to explain the distinction between Raj Gonds and the other sections of the Gond peoples. C. B. Lucie-Smith writing of the Raj Gonds of Chanda suggested that either "the epithet Raj was originally applied to royal and noble Gond families, from which the distinction spread to their followers and the governing class generally; or it may describe the leading Gond tribe which in ancient days conquered the land from other aboriginal clans."[1] But Captain Forsyth believed that Raj Gonds are in many cases the descendants of alliances between Rajput adventurers and Gonds, and R. V. Russell quotes this view with qualified approval.[2]

W. V. Grigson on the other hand lays emphasis rather on the social than the historical causes for the distinction and suggests that such names as Raj Gond arose from "the tendency, familiar throughout India, of local groups of primitive races which are gradually being Hinduized to regard themselves and to be accepted by their Hindu neighbours as separate Hindu castes under new names.[3] The situation in Adilabad seems rather to accord with the second suggestion advanced by Lucie-Smith; for here the Raj Gonds do not form a ruling class or even a class of privileged economic status, but an entire tribal group comprising all strata of society from the feudal chiefs down to the poorest labourer. We will see in a later chapter that the once powerful Gond Kings of Chanda belonged to this group, and their kinsmen in the Adilabad hills were as early as the 17th century referred to as Raj Gonds in patents of the Emperor Aurangzeb.

Here the Raj Gonds, far from aspiring to inclusion in the Hindu fold, consider themselves the true exponents of Gond culture and Gond language, and above all of the traditional Gond religion which involves the sacrifice of cows at the rites for the clan-gods. Many of them have never met a Dhurwe Gond, but those who have come in contact with the few groups of Dhurwe Gonds who have recently drifted across the Chanda border, look down upon them as speaking a corrupt form of Gondi intermixed with much Marathi, and as following different customs; somewhat sweepingly and apparently unjustly they assert that the Dhurwe Gonds have no cult of clan deities "only worshipping Bhimana like Kolams."

It seems indeed that the Raj Gonds of Adilabad, who have lived for almost a century and a half under Muslim rule, and have in consequence been less exposed to the influence of the more intolerant exponents of Hinduism, have retained more of their old culture than

1. *Report of the Land Revenue Settlement of the Chanda District. Central Provinces.* 1869. Nagpur 1870, p. 46.
2. *The Tribes and Castes of the Central Provinces of India.* London 1916. Vol. III. p. 63.
3. W. V. Grigson. *The Maria Gonds of Bastar.* London. 1938 p. 36.